

1508/1400

AN ACCOUNT OF THE PRESENT English Conspiracy,

TAKEN FROM THE
REPORT OF THE SECRET COMMITTEE
OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,

JUST NOW PUBLISHED;

In which are laid open, the Attempts to excite Mutiny in our Fleets, and also the Plan for a general Rising in London, and in other Parts, at this Time meditated by United Irishmen now here, and by numerous other Secret Societies in the Pay or Interests of France.

N. B. In this Account is given the Substance of the Report drawn up by the SECRET COMMITTEE, together with some very interesting Parts of the APPENDIX. To which is added,

A SUITABLE ADDRESS.



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AN
ACCOUNT
OF THE PRESENT
ENGLISH CONSPIRACY.



THE London Corresponding Society have avowed at their meetings, for more than these two years past, that they wish to form a Republic by the help of France. Ashley, their Secretary, who was arrested in 1794, and who is now their Agent in France, is known to have given them hopes of succour from a French force; and meetings were held by them to contrive how to get arms. The disaffected leaders occasionally met at a cellar in Furnival's Inn, and there they held secret consultations about such parts of their project as were thought too dangerous and desperate to be brought before the larger societies. These meetings were particularly attended by Arthur O'Connor, and the Priest Quigley, (or O'Coigly) before their attempt to get over to France. Among their plans was that of effecting a general insurrection at the same moment in the metropolis, and throughout the country, and of attempting to seize or assassinate the King, the Royal Family, and many Members of both Houses of Parliament. An officer of some experience in his Majesty's service was selected as their military leader, and they had sanguine hopes of effecting their purpose by surprise, but they feared



that they might not have numbers enough to maintain and secure themselves after they should have made the attempt; they continued however to think that matters were nearly ready for measures of open violence.

Societies of United Englishmen were formed about the time now spoken of, according to the example of the United Irish Societies, and they kept up a connection with the London Corresponding Society; they for the most part avoided keeping papers for fear of discovery, and they used cyphers or mysterious words in the few writings that passed between them. On the 18th April, 1798, a party of these United English were taken up at a house in Clerkenwell; and on the 19th April a party of the London Corresponding Society was also arrested at a large room in Wych-street. It then appeared that about forty divisions had been formed in London, about twenty of which had regular places and days of meeting, and many more were forming in the country, particularly in Lancashire, and in some parts of the West of England, and of Wales, where there were many United Irishmen who had run away from their own country. At Manchester, and all around it, the conspiracy was extending very fast, when it was checked by the arrest of several of its leaders in 1798; there had been in that town eighty divisions, of not less than fifteen, and not more than thirty-six members each, and the societies around the town formed themselves into twelve districts. Quigley visited Manchester before he set out for France. He then bore the name of Captain Jones, and wore a military dress. Great attempts were made here (though generally in vain) to gain over the soldiery, and the follow-

ing was the oath put to them: "I A. B. do swear not to obey the Colonel, but the People; not the Officers, but the Committee of United Englishmen, sitting in England, Ireland, and Scotland; and to assist with arms, as far as lies in my power, to establish a Republican form of Government in this country and others, and to assist the French on their landing to free this country."

"So help me God."

A persuasion seems to have been universally impressed, that persons of higher situations in life afforded countenance as well as money to these societies, though for reasons of prudence they concealed themselves for the present. The Secret Committee of the House of Commons say, they are of opinion that in some degree this persuasion may have been well founded, but that some art was used to strengthen the impression, in order to give greater encouragement to the conspirators. Persons styling themselves the National Committee of England governed these bodies, but who this National Committee consisted of was kept a secret from them, nevertheless, the whole body implicitly obeyed. The Manchester Society sent delegates to various parts of Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, and Cheshire. Liverpool was also the seat of a central society.

In Scotland the societies have been almost as complete as those in Ireland. The elections of delegates were there carried on by ballot, and it was contrived that nobody should know on whom the choice fell, except the secretary and the person chosen, and as there could be no check on the secretary, it is plain that all these elections (though they appeared to be made by the members) could

always be managed in any way that might be agreeable to the leaders. Delegates for a national meeting were chosen in the like secret manner, and a secret committee was formed in the same way out of the delegates, and this secret committee had really the chief management of the whole Scotch conspiracy. Some of the delegates, however, appear to have been disgusted and alarmed by being thus put into the hands of an unknown authority, and for objects of which they did not understand the extent. The national Scotch meeting was commonly held near Glasgow, and some of its members professed an opinion, "that if the flattering accounts received from London were real, the emancipation of the country was at no great distance." This system of union was borrowed from Ireland, and the conspirators formed wild and extravagant plans of seizing in the same night all the leading people over the whole island. If these persons should resist, they were to be put to death; if they submitted quietly, their lives and property were to be spared, but they were to be kept in custody till a new constitution on French principles should be formed.

The Report of the Secret Committee of the English House of Commons also states, that many attempts have been made to excite mutiny in our fleets by means of the United Irish, and that it has been part of the plan to murder the officers, to seize on the ship, and to carry her to Ireland or to France. The following is an oath which has been given: "I swear to be true to the free and United Irish who are now fighting our cause against tyrants and oppressors, and to defend their rights to the last drop of my blood, and to keep all secret ;

and I do agree to carry the ship into Brest the next time the ship looks out a-head at sea, and to kill every officer and man that shall hinder us except the master, and to hoist a green ensign with a harp in it, and afterwards to kill and destroy the Protestants."

One trial is mentioned of Regan, Murphy, and other Irishmen, on board the *Glory*, who conspired to murder their officers, and to carry the ship over to France, and who, in order to cloak their proceeding and throw the officers off their guard, subscribed and sent up to them, at the very time in question, the following declaration: "We whose names are hereunto annexed, natives of Ireland, with grief and anxiety have heard lately of a horrid plot attributed to us, and which the late unhappy disturbance in Ireland, &c. has given too much colour to, and We for ourselves do solemnly swear before Almighty God, whose awful name we would not take in vain, that we do not know of any plot or conspiracy, or mutinous assembly in the ship, now, or at any other time, and that we will, to the last moment of our lives, defend our King and glorious Constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic.—With hearts full of loyalty to our King, and veneration for your public character and private virtues, we conclude with hoping you will do us the justice to believe that these are the real sentiments of our hearts."

Eight conspirators who had signed the last mentioned declaration, were tried by a court-martial, consisting of Sir A. Gardner, and twelve captains; the charges were fully proved and they suffered death. A case of greater and more complicated villainy has, perhaps, hardly ever happened in the

history of the world, nor was ever death more awful. These men, however, confessed their crime when they were dying, whereas the infamous Quigley, who is extolled by the conspirators as the most virtuous man in the world, excelled them in one part of his wickedness, namely, in dying with what now clearly appears to have been the grossest lie and perjury in his mouth. Regan expected if he had succeeded to be made captain of the *Glory*, and the other conspirators were to be promoted, and the value of the ship given them. Englishmen may learn in some measure from this example what sort of rulers would be set over them if the plots of the present conspirators should succeed. Such men as Regan, Murphy, &c. would be our captains, and our admirals, instead of a Howe, and a St. Vincents, and a Duncan, and a Nelson. I do not think our sailors, any more than our citizens, would much benefit by such a change of masters.

LATE PLANS of an INSURRECTION in LONDON.

MANY Irish Rebels who have fled their country, and are become desperate through their crimes, have been for some time in London, and they appear to be under the direction of some persons of a higher class, who sometimes furnish them with money. These are joined to very formidable Societies of United Irishmen of this country: there is reason to believe that early in 1798 the conspirators in Ireland intended to convey hither many of their own conspirators, and these, in

co-operation with the London Corresponding Society, were to attempt an insurrection in London at the same time when the rebellion broke out in Ireland, but the plan is said to have failed from the Corresponding Society shrinking from the execution of it. About the same time another project was formed for collecting a chosen body of the most determined of the United Irish employed on the river Thames. Large rewards were to be promised, they were to be kept quite ignorant of the precise service to be performed till an attack by the French on some part of the British coast was announced. They were then to be privately armed with daggers, to be put under bold and able leaders, and were to attack in three divisions, by surprise, and at the same moment, the two Houses of Parliament, the Tower, and the Bank. The intelligence obtained from time to time by Government, and the seizure and detention of certain of the intended leaders, and perhaps also the timidity of some of the parties concerned, have hitherto prevented any open attempt.

PRESENT PLAN *of an* INSURRECTION *in* LONDON.

THE Secret Committee of the House of Commons state, "that they have undoubted proof that plans of the same nature with those already described *are now more than ever in agitation.* Irish agents are now concerting with the French a fresh and general insurrection in Ireland. An expedition to co-operate with them is preparing in the ports of France with great expedition. The time seems

to be in a great measure fixed. A diversion by another French force may be expected on different parts of the coasts of this kingdom. It is also part of the plan to attempt an insurrection in the metropolis, and in some other parts of the kingdom where the disaffected societies are most numerous."

The following "Extract from the Instructions to General Humbert, on the Supposition of his Landing in Cornwall," will give some further information to the Reader of what the French intend if they get among us. "It would perhaps be imprudent for you to remain long in Cornwall and would be more adviseable to establish yourself in Devonshire between the Ex and the Tamer. With a little enterprize and skill you might cut off the communication between Dartmouth, Plymouth, and Portsmouth, but you are not to approach those garrisons unless a commotion should there take place, which you should labor to promote. You should direct your march first to Dedmana and Newport. Never keep the high-road, but chuse bye-ways and narrow tracts. Often change your guides and always enquire the road to those towns to which you do not intend to go. To create surprise, now and then take possession of some little town or harbour, and lay it under contribution. All places will then apply to Government for troops, and the forces being thus divided you will destroy them by engaging them separte. It is only by moveable columns that you can be opposed with effect. If the enemy is strong any where you may disperse and commit hostilities in different quarters, and then you may starve both the troops and the inhabitants who are in the towns. The French soldiers should not carry any thing but

arms, ammunition, and bread. They will every where find linen, shoes, and other articles of dress. The inhabitants must supply your wants, and gentlemen's seats will serve you for magazines. If the country should be too much ravaged to subsist you any longer, or if troops sent against you compel you to change your position, you must make forced marches in the night, and rest during the day in the woods and mountains. You must *create* a cavalry after your first establishment, and you may and ought often to change horses. The night will be the time to surprise and put to the sword any post opposed to you. By night 1200 of your men should attack 4 or 5000, and in the day-time, in an open situation, 2000. From a post not intrenched you ought to dislodge 800 men; if intrenched and defended by cannon avoid it."

In some further and more particular instructions General Humbert is told, that "when he is ready to disembark in Cornwall, the troops are to receive four days provisions, and a double ration of brandy, (a common single ration is half a pint) which *they are to drink immediately in order to refresh themselves after the fatigues of the voyage;*" or, in other words, in order to inspire them with that sort of French courage which a Frenchman will certainly find he wants when he first lands on English ground. A pint of brandy drunk off at once is the common receipt for giving French courage; and it is understood to be a circumstance so important to the success of an expedition, that it is thought worthy of a place in the official orders to the General. The orders proceed to say "The first object of the expedition is to put the country in a state of insurrection. The class of the people

most easily moved to insurrection is the poorest class. This may be effected, first, by distributing money or drink among them;" that is, by bribing and debauching them: also, secondly, "by ascribing to Government the public wretchedness;" that is, by lying:" and thirdly, "by instigating them to pillage the public granaries;" that is, by urging them to become thieves and robbers like the French themselves. "But (it is added) since the English people, however regardless of morality," (we hope not quite so regardless as the French) "are nevertheless attached to their laws and respect their magistrates, therefore it will be *expedient* (*N.B.* It is *expediency* that dictates whatever morality General Humbert is to practise) to spare the property of the magistracy. The expences then must be borne by the great, the Lords (those of the Opposition Party when known are to be spared) the Ministers, the Naval and Military Officers, especially those of the Militia. The houses, granaries, castles, and every thing belonging to these must be distributed among the people or pillaged by them. *These are calamities which those of the Republic compel us to inflict.*" This last expression reminds us of the speech which Milton represents Satan to make when he first invades Paradise. Satan is so struck with the fairness of the land which he comes to ruin, compared with his own, that he expresses much the same sort of compunction at what he was about to do, which the French seem to have felt in this instance. "These calamities (it is added) will induce many of the laboring people, and *the rabble*, to espouse our cause, but they must on no account be incorporated with our troops." Thus it seems that some of their best friends are what they themselves

term the rabble, and it is plain also that whatever fine things they may promise, they mean still to treat them as rabble, for they will not so much as do them the honor to mix them with their own troops.

The second object is said to be "to embarrass the commerce of our rivals." It seems by this that the French consider us as commercial rivals, and that because we are rivals they wish to ruin our commercial prosperity, by which it is that so many thousands of our manufacturers support themselves and their families in honest industry. Surely then our manufacturers at least ought every man of them to be against the French, for it is the very object of France to reduce them to beggary. Directions are then given for breaking down bridges, plundering convoys, and *private* as well as public carriages, for burning merchant vessels, &c. and for setting fire in particular to rope works and sail-cloth manufactories. "The workmen, (it is added) by being deprived of employment, will attach themselves to the French;" and this is very coolly spoken of "as the more *captivating* mode of livelihood, as the individual himself contributes nothing towards it."

The third object of the expedition is said to be "to prepare for a further descent." That is, to prepare the way for more hungry and ragged Frenchmen to come in like manner to take our country from us and devour us.

Such are the virtuous and patriotic objects of our present conspirators. We trust every truly virtuous and patriotic man will rise up against them,

for we are persuaded that Englishmen love their wives and families, and also their country, too well to make a present of them to France. We have already 180,000 loyal men armed in the country, but no doubt as many more will arm as may seem necessary, for we must not suffer this great nation to get enslaved in a moment by a handful of half-civilized and hot-headed Irishmen whom we have permitted to get their bread among us; no, nor must we allow ourselves to be betrayed by a set of poor deluded creatures calling themselves United Englishmen, who have got entangled in oaths which they never once understood, who are not suffered so much as to know the names of their own leaders, and who, for aught they can tell, may be mere puppets in the hands of some managers of the plot that have their own villainous ends in view, which managers pretend indeed to have been chosen by the secret societies, but have contrived the thing so very secretly that there can be no certainty of their being the persons that these very societies have elected. Above all, we must not suffer this fine country to be eaten up by a set of hungry Frenchmen, who, it seems, are to hide themselves by day in our woods and mountains, and by night are to prowl about like wolves in our most fruitful districts; who are, moreover, to burn the villages of such as presume to drive them away, so as they would any other noxious animals, and who, when they have thus ravaged one Welch or English county, are next to go and ravage another, and are to prepare the way for a still greater host of unmanageable and starving French Republicans. No, we will not suffer England to fall thus low in the scale of nations, nor will we, from the silly wish of some imaginary good, en-

tirely forfeit the real blessings with which Providence has favored us.

It may be proper here to add a few further words to two classes of people. First,

An ADDRESS to those who have hitherto objected to the Measures taken by the Parliament and the Government to prevent this Rebellion.

TO such let it be observed, that the great height to which this plot has now evidently arisen must be acknowledged both to justify the fears which have been long since entertained, and also to justify, in a great measure, those steps which have been taken to counteract the conspiracy. The Constitution (said some) has been broken by the new laws which have been made; but must it not be owned that extraordinary evils may require extraordinary remedies, and that an old Constitution can sometimes only be preserved by new provisions of law made to meet the new exigencies, just as an old house can be protected when new gangs of robbers are assailing it, only by adding new bolts and bars, and by imposing also a few stricter regulations on certain servants in the house, who are supposed to be in concert with the robbers, than in safer times may have been necessary. That such servants will complain of these new restrictions there is no doubt. The traitors will say that this is a shameful breach of liberty; but let other servants, who are not the same arrant traitors, beware how they unite in the cry, and how they justify by this very cry the rebellion that is hatching, and how they confound their own character with that of the rebels. The persons whom we are now addressing used always to complain that the Government of this country

acted, in the measures which they took, on a necessity which was merely pretended; they insisted that there was no plot, at least none worthy of much attention, in the country. It is now become clear that this plot has not been a pretended one, that they who were nick-named the Alarmists had sufficient reason for their fears, and that under the mere pretext of a Reform in Parliament this plan of insurrection was all along concealed. Let then the well-disposed of the Opposition Party now unite with the supporters of the Parliament and Government, and let them not continue to stifle their conviction till actual blood is spilt, till the King is seized or murdered, the Tower taken by a *coup de main*, the Bank plundered, and a general massacre begun. And lastly, let us add

AN ADDRESS

*To all UNITED ENGLISHMEN and SCOTCHMEN,
and UNITED IRISHMEN, in this Country.*

WE will merely put to them the following questions :

Have you considered, first, that what you are undertaking is likely to produce nothing less than **DEATH TO YOURSELVES**, either instant death in the field, the moment you begin to act, or else (and perhaps even before you can act) an ignominious death on the scaffold? If you have no mercy on yourselves, think on the wives and children, and other fond relations, whom you will leave behind.

Have you considered, secondly, that **AFTER DEATH THERE IS A JUDGMENT**, and dare you go to the God who made you, and when you appear before him, dare you appeal to this

Searcher of the heart that in this your bloody conspiracy, you were altogether benevolent and disinterested, as well as honest, open, and sincere; that you never practised any deceit, as to the means, and were under no criminal prejudice or delusion as to your end; that you were moved by no malice towards any one; by no envy of the rich, no hatred to those in power; by no vanity and self-conceit; by no pride or discontent; by no ambition to rise above the place which God's Providence had assigned to you; by no gain or hope of gain to yourself in particular, on the one hand, and by no turbulence and restlessness of disposition on the other. Shall you be able also to prove before your heart-searching Judge that you had, before you acted, weighed most carefully and conscientiously all the probable consequences of your attempt; that you had examined all political arguments as much on one side as on the other, and had kept your mind so calm as to be perfectly free from prejudice, and from all danger of a false judgment, from the beginning to the end of this business. Though you should not believe in a God now, yet you may chance both to believe and to tremble also at the hour of death; and let it be added, that if the God of heaven should condemn you, there is no priest on earth that can absolve you from your guilt.

Thirdly, Have you considered, that granting what except from the argument's sake must not be granted, namely, that there is no sin in rebelling, yet surely there can be no sin in leaving it alone. Perhaps, indeed you may plead your oath, or rather the oath may be pleaded by those who have entrapped you into it. But remember that though an oath to do any thing which is lawful is most

certainly binding in all cases, yet no oath is binding on any man's conscience which is an oath *to do any thing in itself clearly and manifestly wrong*. If you had taken an oath to murder your own father, and to murder him without any cause, would you be bound in that case to fulfil the oath. Certainly not. By fulfilling such an oath you would only encrease your guilt. And in like manner if you are under oath to do any *other wicked and unlawful act*, such as that of laying your country in blood, and in no righteous cause, most clearly your duty is not to fulfil it. There can be no bond among men bent on unlawful designs for this reason. It may become a duty in such cases even for men to betray one another, and some of the most conscientious of your party are said to have lately come forward and informed on this principle. It may be further remarked, however, that perhaps the oath you have taken has been drawn up in such doubtful and ambiguous terms (in terms purposely made ambiguous) that it ought not in fairness to bind you to the present conspiracy. You swore, perhaps, to promote a reform only in the representation, and this reform in the representation now comes out to be an entire surrender of your country to France, together with a fierce and bloody revolution. Tell then your leaders that you did not consider your oath when you took it as binding you to this extent, and that therefore you do not think it can so bind you now; and on this ground you may leave them.

Fourthly, Have you considered how little likely it is, even if your insurrection should for a time succeed, that any thing like real liberty would follow? Might not some bold leader of the insurgents soon turn to his own purposes the army raised

for the overthrow of the old Government? Unquestionably this army would rule the land, and it would enforce obedience to whatever might be the will of those who might from time to time contrive to get this all-powerful instrument into their hands. This army then, which would be but a handful of men compared with the whole people, might put down those whom the people should set up. It might effectually overawe elections even after the form of universal suffrage might be set up. By means of a pretended legislature, which should be its tool, an army might impose as a qualification for all voters, tests of fidelity to the villains at the head of it, and thus three-fourths, or nine-tenths of the pretended national body of electors, and the whole of the more conscientious part of them might be excluded from this their supposed unalienable right of universal suffrage. And if all this might not prove sufficient, an army might turn out the representatives even after the people should have thus partially chosen them. It might seize their persons in the midst of their deliberations, and it might either hurry them away into perpetual banishment, as was lately done by the French army, without the form of trial, or it might send them to be locked up in prisons, as that famous Republican Oliver Cromwell used to do in England. Let a revolution, in short, once happen in this country, and then, instead of profiting as we now do by the deliberate wisdom of ages, we must take up with such Constitution as a few men in the whirlwind of their passions, and in the folly as well as the fury of the moment, should force down upon us with the bayonet.

Have you then, it may be asked, contemplated all these dangers? Have you corrected those errors on the subject which are natural to inconsiderate and uneducated men? Have you corrected them by means of deep investigation and calm reflection, as well as by carefully turning over the page of history, and appealing to the testimony of facts? Have you been even qualified by your situation in life to judge on points of this sort? Mr. Hume, the great English Historian, has observed*, in consequence of a dispassionate examination of these subjects, "It is seldom that the *people* gain any thing by revolutions in government, (even supposing such revolutions for a time to succeed) because the new settlement, jealous and insecure, must commonly be supported with more expence and severity than the old;" a truth than which nothing can be more obvious. Englishmen however should judge from their own actual history in this case, for We once experienced what was the effect of the republican spirit in England. Some ardent minds, seeming at first only to resist the unjust encroachments of the crown, pushed the nation to republicanism; they pulled down the King and the House of Lords, on the ground that all power was that of the people; and what followed? Why nothing but faction after faction, civil war on civil war, and revolution on the back of revolution, till Cromwell, who had all the while been watching his opportunity, raised himself, under the new name of a Protector, and by the help of the same army which first fought against Charles, to be much higher than the highest King of England. The

* Vol. VII. page 118.

people, enraged at their disappointment, rushed soon after the death of Cromwell, (as the people are always apt to do) into a contrary extreme. They invited a son of their murdered King to take the throne, and there were now no bounds either to their joy or to their submission. This ill-controlled King and his successor trampled on their liberties; and in consequence of so much bitter experience both of the evil of arbitrary power on the one hand, and of the mischief of republicanism on the other, that form of Government was established in the country by the admission of King William, under which the experience of a hundred years has proved that true liberty is best enjoyed and national prosperity promoted—a form of Government equally removed from one extreme and from the other.

May then the glorious Constitution of Great Britain live for ever. May no foreign enemy take it from us, and may no domestic and designing traitor cheat us out of it. May we rally round it, especially in times of danger, and may the nations of the earth, when the present convulsions shall be over, learn in like manner wisdom from experience; may they prefer at last that sober medium in which true wisdom generally lies, and may they learn to respect and to imitate the Glorious British Constitution!

F I N I S.

